

**MISSISSIPPI WIRELESS COMMUNICATION COMMISSION**

**July 2, 2009 Meeting Minutes**

Place: MDOT Auditorium

**Commission Members Present:**

**MS Department of Corrections  
MS Emergency Management Agency  
MS Department of Public Safety  
MS National Guard  
MS Association of Supervisors  
MS Department of Environmental Quality  
MS Department of Transportation  
MS Association of Fire Chiefs  
MS Office of Homeland Security  
MS Department of Information Technology Services  
MS Department of Health  
SafeCity Initiative**

**Chris Epps  
Mike Womack  
Michael Berthay  
Gary Ladd  
Steve Gray  
Keith Harkins  
Willie Huff  
Tom Lariviere  
Jay Ledbetter  
David Litchliter  
Mike Lucius  
Joseph McArthur**

**Advisory Members Present:**

**Senate Public Utilities Committee**

**Senator Nolan Mettetal**

Chairman Epps called the meeting to order at 1:30 PM and welcomed everyone.

Chairman Epps called for a motion to approve the minutes of the June 4, 2009 meeting. Mr. Mike Lucius made the motion and it was seconded by Mr. Gary Ladd. The motion passed with none opposed.

Chairman Epps recognized Mr. Keith Harkins to report for the Procurement Review Committee. Mr. Harkins reported that no requests came before the Committee this month. Therefore, there was no report for the Commission.

Mr. Willie Huff reported for the Governance/Interoperability Committee. They continue to have technical reviews with the PSIC applicants. So far only one has turned in the correct package and requested to spend the money. The Committee is expecting several more soon. As far as interoperability issues statewide, we continue to work with those local governments that have expressed an interest or need to interoperate with MSWIN.

During the application process for the PSIC money and the technical information gathering, we have had several entities that want to use the PSIC money to enhance the coverage of their current legacy systems. Mr. Huff asked Mr. Roach to provide some background on that issue.

Mr. Roach indicated that they have met with a number of counties over the past few months. Most of those counties have the legacy high band systems without complete coverage of the county for all their first responders. They want to add repeaters or tower sites to increase their existing coverage of the county as opposed to procuring interoperability. In the last two Committee meetings, the Committee members were of the consensus that these funds should not be used for increasing operability of existing legacy systems that would not provide further interoperability but should be used for either a MSWIN bridging solution or adding MSWIN radios so they can interoperate with the system once it is built out.

Mr. Huff added that in their Nov. 8<sup>th</sup> presentation to the Commission, we said that the PSIC funds (approximately \$8.1M dollars) would be used to enhance interoperability between or within contiguous counties and discouraged wireless or IP based networking between several counties. He also stated that he would like to hear how the Commission feels on this issue because when you sit and listen to the technology that some of these places have, you realize they have needs that they don't have funding for and they feel the PSIC funding could help relieve some of the

pressure they have with the legacy systems. The Committee has about 19 people that have turned in requests. Requests for enhancing legacy systems for coverage have been discouraged because of the amount of money we've got and because we are trying to not foster the development of legacy systems. If the Commission wants to go back and revisit this, then we must open this back up and allow everyone the chance to justify why they need the PSIC money for enhancing legacy systems for coverage.

Chairman Epps asked if the grant will allow us to do that as it relates to interoperability. Mr. Huff said that the general PSIC guidelines could very well have that in it but we made a presentation which the Commission accepted and that was not in our guidelines. If we allow it, the amount of money will have to be re-decided and re-distributed. He then asked Mr. Jay Ledbetter to comment on the issue. Mr. Ledbetter indicated that the wording in the PSIC Grant probably does allow for flexibility but it is up to the Commission to decide how to distribute the money.

Chairman Epps then recognized Mr. Roach who shared that the counties could implement a bridging solution. They could buy some MSWIN radios for key first responders and provide some interoperability with the system. In most cases this would not require a lot of money.

Mr. Mike Womack stated that it appears the biggest problem is that we have approximately \$8M dollars with 82 counties which if given an equal allocation would only get approximately \$100K each. While we would not allocate an equal amount for each county, it wouldn't go very far. It would have to be used for a bridging solution to tie into MSWIN. While he is in favor of increasing coverage of local responders and it is a goal we have to look at, this \$8M dollars isn't going to go very far if we try to do that.

Mr. Huff said the ability to match is the selection process being used. Some have sent in letters of intent after the April 3<sup>rd</sup> deadline. We are working through the ones received by the deadline and if it looks like we will be able to come back and consider the ones submitted after the deadline, we will do so. Mr. Huff suggested going through the first round of examinations and come back and look at coverage issues in a case by case basis.

Mr. Womack said we have no flexibility in this in that we are required to push these funds to local governments. Mr. Huff responded that we have flexibility. It can be used by the State but that was not the desire here. The desire was provide a bridge solution to the current legacy systems and MSWIN or prepare them for when MSWIN arrives in their area.

Mr. Steve Gray, one of the Commission's local government representatives commented that as long as locals have some flexibility with the process, they will be fine with it.

Chairman Epps noted that he liked the way the Commission voted when the project was started. To go back now, in his opinion would be counterproductive. Mr. Roach said he thinks they are looking for a quick fix. It is a solution for operability and a short term fix for communication solutions – not long term. Other federal regulations will force changes in the next 4-10 years anyway and we would hate to see them continue down a road that will be closed to them while a lot of people will be depending on them for first responder assistance.

Mr. Womack said we are back to the issue that we've been struggling with over the last year which is how we can get small jurisdictions a radio they can afford. I don't think we can solve this with this \$8M dollars. He made a motion that we continue with this first round just the way we've been moving and then at completion of the first round, any monies that are available, we will at least look at the possibility of expanding existing coverage. The motion was seconded by Mr. Jay Ledbetter. Chairman Epps called for any discussion.

Mr. Huff requested permission to yield a minute of his discussion time to Mr. David Sharp, EMA Director of Lauderdale County. It was granted and Mr. Sharp indicated that he was part of the reason this discussion has come up. In Lauderdale County, the majority of first responders (700-800) are outside of the City of Meridian. Seventy-five to eighty percent of those are volunteers. They have one tower in the county that all of their communications are on. One wind storm or

terrorist act and the whole communication system will be down for months. Right now they have only 40-45% walkie-talkie coverage in the whole county. What I have proposed to Mr. Huff, Mr. Roach, and Mr. Buffington on two occasions is putting digital repeaters out there. It will give us almost 100% mobile coverage and an excess of 90% walkie-talkie coverage. First responders would have access to that gateway that will be in our dispatch center. We are not asking that you pay for everything. We are eligible for \$200K. We can build the backbone for \$300K and then phase our radios over to digital over the next 4-5 years which would put us totally digital in advance of the 2017 mark the FCC has set for digital compliance. It also would give NAS Meridian access to MSWIN through our system. Our EOC is NAS Meridian's backup and vice-versa. We are talking about interoperability that is going to make over 90% of our people interoperable with MSWIN. That's the situation we are in and some others may be in also.

Mr. Huff stated that what Mr. Sharp said is replicated about 20 times in the conversations they've had with some counties.

Chairman Epps returned to the motion at hand and asked if there was any further discussion. There was none. The motion passed with none opposed.

Mr. Huff continued his report. We feel really good about legislation that has come out of Washington. There has been some talk that the legislation that is providing the funds for MSWIN is cutting funds for some agencies in what is called FEMA Mitigation Funds and we are taking generator money and building radio systems with it. He asked Mr. Mike Womack to explain. Mr. Womack said based on Katrina, we were allocated \$432M dollars worth of Hazard Mitigation Grant funds. FEMA will only allow 10% of that amount to be used for generators and for warning systems. When we started out with \$432M, we could have spent \$43.2M on generators and warning systems. Now that \$140M has been pulled from HMGP to support MSWIN, we only have \$292M and only \$29.2M can be used for generators and warning systems. The bottom line is that the amount for generators and warning systems was reduced. We will spend almost \$30M on generators and warning systems and that's a lot of money but having a State- of -the -Art Statewide Radio System is just as important as those generators and warning systems.

Chairman Epps recognized Mr. Bill Roach to give the Commission a MSWIN Project Update. Mr. Roach shared an updated map and reported that a lot has happened in the last month. All Phase 1 sites are up today except for one. That site is not on the backbone. It is a spur site just east of Natchez. Equipment and electronics have been loaded in all those sites except for two at this point so coverage will be up on the east and middle part of Phase 1 and all those sites are in Wide Area Trunking today. As to the area coming into Jackson in the center part of the state, the left hand side coming up through Simpson, Copiah and Hinds Counties – those towers are up and electronics are being loaded on those. Construction has started on the other sites so it looks like we're going to be up on those during the early part of the summer. We converted the site on the top of the Sillers Building that was previously connected to the MSOW stationed at MEMA, over to MSWIN. Now if you are driving from Jackson toward the coast, you have portable hand held radio coverage from north of Madison to Piney Woods. Coverage drops at Piney Woods and picks back up just north of Mendenhall. On mobile, you have coverage almost all the way. It is a little spotty in the hills between Piney Woods and Mendenhall but as we get the other sites up, that hole will be filled. We will start working right after that on the east path up from Phase 1 into 2A.

FEMA loaned 674 portable radios to Mr. McAllister at MEMA. They sub-loaned them for us to house at the WCC and were used as our cache of Strategic Reserve Radios. FEMA has asked to get their radios back. They want 200 back after the Governor's Conference and the rest back by January 31, 2010. Twenty percent of the PSIC Funds was to be used by the state for Strategic Reserve. We ordered 370 EF Johnson radios to replace part of the FEMA radios. We also took delivery of 100 Motorola Radios in the MSWIN contract. Initially these will be used for Strategic Reserve until they are distributed to agencies.

An item in House Bill 2346 (Supplemental Appropriations Bill) allocated \$100M to the MSWIN project. It was signed by the President on June 24<sup>th</sup> so hopefully we will have that money coming in at some point. Serena Clark from the Governor's office and I went to San Diego last week to attend the State Wide Interoperability Coordinator Meeting. There was one presentation by DHS/OEC where they noted about 20-30 Federal grant programs that all had components that could be used for interoperable communications. We will be looking into some of those additionally.

The National Governors Association Conference will be held on the coast on July 17-20. We have already relocated SOWS to establish communications and building coverage for the Beau Rivage and the Convention Center. Mr. Donald Loper is primary on that and we are working closely with him.

The Build-to-Suit RFP has been re-issued. Questions from vendors have been answered and we had good participation at the vendor conference. Those proposals are due July 13<sup>th</sup>.

Chairman Epps called for questions. Mr. Keith Harkins asked if the 100 Motorola radios were a part of the discussion that the Procurement Review Committee had with the WCC. It was not. Approximately four thousand combined portable and mobile radios are in the original MSWIN contract and we took delivery of 100 of those to beef up the Strategic Reserves in case the FEMA radios have to all be sent back.

Mr. Roach also shared that Project Director, Ms. Vergia Burrell, has taken another position with Motorola in Missouri. Mr. Bob Busch who has been with the project as Engineer will assume the role of Project Director.

Mr. Litchliter provided a report on the monthly expenditures. He noted that we have three future funding sources approved. \$35M in State Legislature Bonds which could be sold in September and available in November, \$20M in DHS funding, and \$100M in Federal Legislation funds. We may have close to full funding and able to buy some towers rather than lease. Monthly operating expenditures were about \$400,000.00 for June and about \$2M was paid in Motorola invoices.

Chairman Epps appointed a Revenue Committee. We need some help from this Commission to make sure everything we think is coming through comes through and more besides, in particular with the locals so concerned about the \$200 per unit fee. The following persons have agreed to serve on the Committee and if others of you would like to join, it can be expanded. We thank each of them for accepting this challenge.

WCC Revenue Committee:      Mr. Mike Lucius, MS Department of Health – Chairman  
   Mr. Steve Gray, MS Association of Supervisors  
   Mr. Quincy Mukoro, MS Municipal League

A press conference is being planned. We are inviting the Governor, Advisory Board Members, and Commission Members. We want to share with the State of Mississippi how far we have come from the Coast to Jackson. It will be good for the citizens to know and for law enforcement to know what we are doing. Information about the date, time and location will be emailed.

The next meeting will be August 6, 2009, in the MDOT Auditorium at 1:30 PM.

Mr. Tom Lariviere made a motion to adjourn and Mr. Steve Gray seconded the motion. The motion passed with none opposed.

Meeting adjourned at approximately 2:30 PM.